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POSSIBILITIES OF FREIGHT TRAFFIC ON INTER-URBAN LINES

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The word interurban as applied to railways to-day is descriptive of the frequent passenger and freight service between cities, towns and country districts which has come to be the distinguishing characteristics of these properties.

The first interurban railways were built for passenger traffic only, and with little or no idea of revenue from freight or other traffic. These lines were built cheaply, for operation by electricity and were, in a way, but street car lines extended out from large cities into the surrounding country and to neighboring towns. Franchises were obtained in the towns for the use of the streets. In some cases highways were used through the country; where private right of way was obtained it was devious and narrow, the alignment was crooked, the grades heavy.

Soon after the establishment of these passenger lines it became apparent that a package, or less than car-load freight service, could be established with profit and without interference to the passenger service already established. Then came the establishment, where the physical condition of the property permitted, of a car-load freight service. As new lines and extensions were projected, especially in less densely populated territories, the possible freight earnings were considered and the lines constructed and equipped for freight traffic as well as passenger traffic. And so the change has been going on until the modern interurban railway of to-day is, in many instances, a thoroughly well-built and equipped railroad operated by electricity.

The modern, well-built interurban railway, with its adequate facilities at its large terminals, consisting of a conveniently located and arranged freight house for less than car-load shipments, conveniently located team yards for car-load shipments, suitable provisions for factory and warehouse locations, transfer connections with the other railways entering the terminal, adequate facilities at

all towns (consisting of a conveniently located freight station, and yard with team track, stock yards, and land available for elevator and warehouse sites), its intermediate industrial sidings at reasonable distances from towns and its freight equipment and motive power sufficient for the business of its territory has unlimited opportunities for freight traffic.

The days of railroad cut-rates, rebates and special privileges to favored shippers are gone. Business must now be created and controlled largely through the service and facilities of the railway. The interurban railway may excel in its territory its steam competitors, by offering to its shippers more frequent and reliable service and equally good or better facilities. It is in position, because of its low operating cost per train unit, to give frequent regular service for less than car-load shipments, and for car-load shipments; and special movements for comparatively small tonnage trains of live stock and perishable freight. Again, because of the local character of its business, it can make much better provision for the volume of its business and thus give its shippers more reliable and satisfactory delivery. It does not become congested with an unusual volume of through business, as it practically has none; nor do weather conditions seriously impede its operations.

This service of the interurban railway is of great value to every resident along its lines and to every shipper in its territory. For this reason it obtains at competitive points the major portion of the business, and at non-competitive points draws from a much enlarged territory. Its tributary territory increases in population and production; new enterprises seek its towns. It creates new freight traffic through the encouragement given in town and country to the production of high class commodities.

Just as an interurban railway is limited in possible freight earnings if it can only transport less than car-load shipments, so is it handicapped if it may only transport local shipments. By local shipments is meant those originating at or destined to points on its own line. Foreign business, or that originating at or destined to points on the lines of its connections, can be handled only when proper provision is made for interchange and satisfactory arrangements made with connecting lines for the handling of this through traffic as a whole or in part under through tariffs and at a through

rate. Many steam lines have opposed this joint business with interurban railways; the opposition being much greater in some localities than in others.

In some few instances where steam lines have refused to recognize interurban lines and interchange traffic with them, they have been forced by law to do so. In other instances the arrangement is brought about as a reciprocal traffic agreement wherein the steam line hopes to profit from the tonnage which the interurban railway is in position to route via or deliver to its line. And, this tonnage may be made an item worth while, for with proper service, and equitable and competitive rates, the limit to the tonnage which the interurban railway may obtain is the entire tonnage which is shipped into or out of its entire territory, when this territory is developed to the highest possible degree of business activity and productivity.

Much of the opposition of the steam lines has been caused by the methods adopted by the interurban railway for conducting its business. Cut-rates for local business are not fair competition if the interurban railway expects its connecting lines to join it in through or foreign traffic. Local methods of accounting in particular through traffic and intercharge at variance with standard practice; failure to comply with, or adopt in practice the rules of the various national railway associations pertaining to through traffic; improper facilities, or the lack of any facilities at all, and the lack of systematic operation, discourage the steam railways in this traffic arrangement. Every connection possible should be obtained, because each line reaches much local territory not reached by other lines, and has its influence on many distant connections.

The interurban railway, when in position to handle local and foreign traffic, is given the greatest opportunity to develop its territory. In farming country, grain elevators, lumber, coal and stock yards, and factories may be located on its depot grounds at all stations. In large cities, warehouses and factories may be located along its lines, and at all points sidings may be laid to factories already established, and transfer connections made with all railways for the reciprocal switching of cars between all industries in the town.

In an ordinary territory, be it farming, mining, or in fact any

sort of a district, the car-load business of a railway will far exceed the less than car-load business. It is from this car-load business that the railway will receive its greatest freight earnings. The major portion of car-load business is not so-called perishable freight; much of the less-than-car-load freight is. Car-load freight is loaded or unloaded by the shipper; less-than-car-load freight is loaded and unloaded, perhaps handled several times, by the railway employees. Both require practically an equal amount of station time and expense. The car-load business of a territory is the foundation of a freight business, and the interurban railway, equipped for less than car-load business only, is receiving but a small part of the possible freight earnings in its territory. With an established car-load business in the important commodities of its territory, the interurban railway will find a means of maintaining for all shipments a regular and reliable service, which is essential to the successful conduct of a freight business.

A prosperous appearance inspires confidence. The prosperous appearing lawyer inspires confidence in the mind of his client; the prosperous appearing bank inspires the confidence of the depositor, and so does the prosperous appearing railway inspire the confidence of the shipper. An interurban will not, or cannot, succeed in any community until it obtains the confidence of the shippers and until these shippers are satisfied that they may route their shipments via the interurban railway with every assurance of as good or better service than they may obtain otherwise.

If the weeds are growing on the right of way along the team track and around the depot, it is a sign of lack of business. These weeds must not grow; this lack of business must not continue; regular business in the necessary commodities of the community must be established which will give to the interurban property the appearance of prosperity so necessary to success. Back this up by service which can be depended upon at all times, and the interurban railway stands a fair chance of holding its own in the business of the community. Convince the shippers by proof that the grain, the hogs, and the cattle can be hauled to market, no matter where the market may be, and the merchants of the community will be satisfied that you can haul not only the merchandise shipments from the neighboring town, but can also haul from any point the car-load merchan-

dise such as flour, feed, fruits, furniture, coal, lumber, and all the necessary articles consumed by the community. The proof to be given the shipper is service—and in this as in no other thing may the interurban railway excel. As previously stated, the only limit to be placed on the freight business of the modern interurban railway is the total of every shipment originating in or destined to its territory.

Competition in freight traffic will exist in every community where there is more than one railway. The interurban railway equipped with industries, team yards and freight houses, equal to its competitors, for handling the necessary in-bound and out-bound commodities of the community with access to the factories and industries of the town through transfer connections, and enjoying reciprocal switching arrangements or through private industry tracks, can fairly compete for the business of the community.

The frequent and regular service of the interurban railway is of the utmost value, for by this means it outdistances competition in local merchandise and in local car-load shipments. This frequent service and the through traffic arrangements with several steam lines, insures to the shipper the shortest route with naturally the best time to or from any distant market, and at a rate equal to competitors. These connections with steam lines, if in a territory where many connections may be made and through rates and routes established to and from many markets, give the buyer and the shipper located on the interurban lines many advantages. The south, east, west or north may be the best market at any given time for the grain, live stock or other commodities originating in the territory. These connections put these markets within easy reach and afford the service so essential to the largest profit of the shipper. Many markets offer quicker sales and bigger profits with less hazard and less capital invested for the produce shipper.

The manufacturer, the merchant and the dealer in lumber, coal and similar articles, appreciates a large territory for selling or buying. The direct route is added assurance of the receipt of shipments in salable and undamaged condition, and in the shortest time possible. This reduces the hazard in his business by permitting the carrying of a smaller stock, yet with every assurance of taking care of all trade with seasonable and salable goods.

To hold the respect of the community and of the connections upon whom it depends for much service and many favors, the interurban railway must compete fairly ; it must be a railway among railways. It must not undermine the business of its competitor by unfair or unbusiness-like methods. It does not need to do this to obtain business, for as soon as its worth in the community becomes apparent it can obtain an always increasing business through the accommodations it has to offer.

The interurban railway must always bear in mind that it is a local proposition, that for this reason its territory will show its appreciation of the attention given to its business, and that, regardless of the length of the line or the size of the trade center, every mile of the track is a main line and every town or industrial siding on the main line is entitled to only the best in service. No business is too small or none too large for the interurban railway. It has no through business not originating in its territory to congest its rails ; it is in position to give to its territory service and attention as no competitor, with its larger and more complicated organization may give. This is intensified railroading which makes the possibility of developing local freight traffic practically unlimited.

The interurban railway is to-day local in character. If in the future these lines are extended or consolidated until great systems of many miles in length are built up, added traffic of a through nature will be given to these present local lines. But if, in any way, this through traffic be permitted to interfere with the local service, and the attention it is now possible to give the local territory, the interurban railway will lose its greatest opportunity. As long as the interurban railway will keep its organization and its service local in character, it will only gain by this consolidation. The opportunities of the consolidated railway will be greater than the opportunities of any form of railway now in existence.

Perhaps no phase of the interurban railway question offers more serious problems and yet greater opportunities than the industrial development of the territory. The interurban railway may profitably center its energy upon the development of a comparatively small territory, and need not rest content until every foot of territory is producing every ton of freight possible.

How can this territory be made to produce the greatest tonnage

for the railway? The character of the country must be very carefully studied and all natural resources taken into account. Grain elevators must be established, with grain buyers, at all points in grain-producing territory; retail coal dealers must be found and located on the railway grounds. Lumber yards, farm machinery warehouses, merchandise warehouses, must be brought into the community, either from old locations or as new companies. All classes of business dependent upon railway transportation must be encouraged.

The co-operation of the commercial organizations must be obtained in towns where these exist, or if they do not exist, organizations must be perfected in an effort to locate new factories and enterprises in the town. Every effort must be made to keep in touch with prospective moves of factories or of branches or new enterprises contemplated, and when this has been done no opportunity should be lost for demonstrating the desirability of locating in this interurban territory. Here again the local character of the interurban railway is immensely valuable, as the personal interest given to the affairs of these local commercial clubs, and in the development of these towns, is appreciated for its value by all the community.

The development of a vast factory district in or near large cities and industrial centers is very possible for the interurban railway. The assurances which it may give of adequate service for switching revenue, the liberal contracts which it can offer for trackage, and the close personal attention which may be given to the development of projects, will attract industries and make the venture successful.

The interurban railway should not rest content until every piece of land in its territory, with natural resources of commercial value, is being developed. If there be material for manufacturing, a company must be found or organized for utilizing and marketing the product; and likewise if there be mineral, timber or similar material, a way must be found for developing the property and marketing the commodity.

The farming country may even come in for its share of attention. Better farming means bigger crops and greater tonnage. New markets created by the interurban railway demand certain farm products, and the growing of such products is to be encour-

aged. The land close to large cities may be developed into small truck, poultry and fruit farms, creating a local tonnage of high-class freight into the cities and a tonnage out-bound for the subsistence of the community. Dairy farms for supplying the trade of the large centers may be encouraged for the traffic in milk. The establishment of canning factories in the small towns, taking from the surrounding country vegetables and fruits, will create a tonnage in-bound and out-bound.

The encouragement of locations of state institutions, sanitariums, resort hotels, and of real estate ventures in suburban towns near large cities, will add to the freight traffic through the tonnage of building materials and subsistence merchandise.

These are a few of the opportunities given to an interurban line for creating freight traffic in its territory.

Solicitation of freight is of the utmost importance to the interurban railway. The shippers must be given knowledge of the service which the railway has to offer; of the territory from or to which it can handle shipments to the best advantage, and the assurance that the rate is competitive. When contracts are to be let for supplies, such as coal for industries, etc., the buyer must be brought in touch with dealers on the railways' lines or with those who will ship via the railways' lines. Frequently contracts are let for new construction, such as public buildings, to contractors not located in the territory and not acquainted with the service of the interurban railway. The advantages of the line must be brought to the attention of such parties, while at the same time local supply men should be requested to ask for opportunities to bid on the materials.

If a farmer, merchant, dealer or plain ordinary man has anything to sell, or wants to buy anything produced on the interurban lines, a buyer or seller must be found and the movement be thus secured for the railways' lines. Consistent solicitation and friendly calls upon the shippers of the territory will bring results. It advertises and keeps the line before the people, it pleases the shipper to think that his business is appreciated and worth asking for, it affords the solicitor the opportunity to straighten out many little misunderstandings which might result in withdrawal of business from the line, and it informs him of many large shipments moving in or out of the territory which might otherwise be overlooked. Regardless of the excellence of the service which you may have to offer, the

average shipper wants the railway to come after the business and ask for it.

Opportunity is given the interurban to advertise its freight service, through its passenger service. This keeps the line before the people, which is the essential thing in railway advertising.

Steam railways make the claim that in some instances passenger trains are operated at a loss, as an incentive to freight traffic. This may never be necessary on interurban lines, but efficient, frequent and convenient passenger train service is a great help to the interurban railway in obtaining freight traffic. Likewise good freight service for merchandise shipments is a big help in obtaining general freight traffic. "On Time" service is the best advertisement a railway can have, for a satisfied traveler or shipper praises it; a dissatisfied one "knocks," and the "knocker" makes the most noise.

Keep the freight service before the people, through the columns of the local papers, special advertising time-cards and bulletins to agents and representatives. This is not costly. A few dollars each year will keep the shippers supplied with all necessary information, and they will repay many times over in traffic the thoughtfulness of the railway company.

The organization of the freight department for an interurban railway must not contain red tape; but, to give results, must be made up of good men, doing their work intelligently and carefully. Every man from the traffic manager to the station agent is an important factor in the freight business of the interurban railway. Careful and conscientious attention to details and prompt and courteous attention to inquiries and complaints will greatly assist in obtaining the confidence of the shipper and thereby his shipments.

All work of the office must be thoroughly done, standard practice being the best method to pursue. No better blanks and forms can be used than those ordinarily used by railways and adopted by them after years of experimentation.

In the matter of freight claims, too much emphasis cannot be laid upon the value of prompt investigation and settlement, where the railway is responsible for loss, damage or overcharge. Business is often routed against a line with which just claims are pending, where the claims are long delayed in settlement through inefficient investigation.

The interurban railway must keep a record of its freight traffic even down to the smallest shipment of the smallest shipper. Records of shipments received and forwarded by individual shippers, as well as stations, will be of the utmost value in obtaining business. These records will show the amount of business obtained, and having approximate knowledge of the total tonnage of shippers or stations is an incentive to greater efforts in obtaining all the business. As an example, from the records of shipments forwarded or received in certain seasons of the year, the traffic movement may be anticipated, solicited and obtained by the interurban railway.

Possibilities of freight traffic on modern interurban railways might better be the subject of this article; but what is true of the modern interurban railway, with its facilities and traffic agreements wherein it may handle a general freight business, is also true, in part, of all interurban railways.

Those handicapped because of the physical conditions of the property must necessarily conduct a restricted freight business; but those handicapped only by lack of station facilities and traffic arrangements have prospects for the future.

The possibilities of freight traffic are great on any interurban property; the earnings most gratifying. To the modern interurban railway the possibilities and earnings are the greatest both now and in the future.